



AOT in Action

TOURISM WORKS FOR ARIZONA!

Issue 138 – December 18, 2006

Welcome to AOT in Action, your weekly e-newsletter from the Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT).

A Message from the Director:

Good morning,

Last week, December 9th – 11th, I had the privilege of attending the US Tour Operators Association's (USTOA) Annual Conference held at the Westin Kierland Resort and Spa in Scottsdale. Nearly 750 delegates were present to attend educational sessions and several networking events. This Arizona event represented one of the largest ever gatherings of USTOA members. The companies within this organization move more than 10 million passengers annually and account for an annual sales volume of more than \$8 billion. These companies also represent some of the top names in travel and the conference is designed to bring these elite travel sellers together with the finest travel suppliers and destination from around the world. Several Arizona organizations attended the event, ensuring the Grand Canyon State was well represented. I was honored to attend Saturday's welcome reception featuring a "Taste of Arizona" theme. The evening showcased some of the finest and tastiest fare of our executive chefs from all around the state. The conference was a tremendous success and those that attended found great networking opportunities as well as conducted several successful appointments that will lead to great new travel business for Arizona.

Have a great week.

Margie A. Emmermann Director Arizona Office of Tourism

AOT News Flash

AOT Presents "Branding Arizona" Workshop Series

The Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT) is proud to present a complimentary workshop in a series

of workshops on "Branding Arizona." The workshop will cover what a brand is; how AOT is branding Arizona; how the Arizona brand impacts your region; and how you can leverage the Arizona brand to differentiate your products in the marketplace. For more information or to register please, contact Sarah Martins at 602-364-3687 or via email at smartins@azot.gov. The workshop will be held at the following location:

December 20, 2006
10 a.m. – 12 p.m.
JW Marriott Starr Pass Resort and Spa
San Pedro 1
3800 West Starr Boulevard
Tucson, AZ 85745

Competition Winners Enjoy Arizona Hospitality

In October and November 2006, Arizona ran a Travel Trade Awareness Campaign in the United Kingdom publication, Travel Weekly. The campaign detailed a different region of the state each week for six weeks and the readers, who were all UK and Ireland Travel professionals, had the opportunity to enter an online competition to win a place on an Arizona familiarization trip. The prize winners arrived in Arizona on December 3rd for a six-night visit. The 10 prize winners represented retail travel agents and tour operators from all over the UK and Ireland. Their Arizona tour included overnight stays in Phoenix, Scottsdale, Flagstaff, the Grand Canyon and Tucson, with accommodations ranging from luxury resorts to a working ranch. In addition to the wonderful hospitality from hotels and restaurants around the state, the group also experienced some of Arizona's natural beauty with visits to the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, the Pueblo Grande Museum and a sightseeing helicopter flight over the Grand Canyon. For more information on this program, contact Kristy Swanson at 602-364-3696 or via email at kswanson@azot.gov.

Trippin' with AOT

AOT on the Road: Visiting Rural Tourism Development Grant Recipients

AOT staff recently visited three FY 07 Rural Tourism Development Grant (RTDGP) Award winners. The purpose of the visits are for AOT to become familiar with the project first hand, to meet face to face with the project coordinator to explain the grant program and to answer any questions they might have regarding where to begin, reimbursement requests, project status reports, and to provide the project coordinator with other information on AOT related programs. The first stop was the Town of Clarkdale. The \$50,000 award will be used to renovate a 1920 two level historic building to be dedicated as the first museum in Clarkdale which will be named, "The Clarkdale Heritage Center." Project will also include parking lot stripping, directional and building signage and the addition of a sidewalk from the building to an adjacent monument and overlook. The Patagonia Area Business Association (PABA) and the Sonoita- Elgin Chamber of Commerce received \$50,000 for the Mountain Empire Sign and Sculpture Project. Funds will be used for the fabrication and installation of seven thematic welcome signs visually uniting the region in the visitor's mind, which include a visitor announcement board of similar design. In the Town of Superior, the \$50,000 award will be used to renovate a caboose to house a visitors center in the under utilized community park situated on US 60 as well as park improvements such as landscaping, hardscapes, seating and lighting. For more information, contact Karen Bult at 602-364-3708 or via email at kbult@azot.gov.

Arizona Enjoys Statewide Exposure at London Show

Arizona was very well represented recently during World Travel Market in London. World

Travel Market is the premier global event for the travel industry and the largest travel trade show in the United Kingdom. The event, held November 6-9, showcased vacation destinations from around the world and attracted travel professionals and media from all over the UK. In addition to the AOT staff, the Arizona delegation consisted of the Greater Phoenix CVB, Scottsdale CVB, Tucson CVB, Flagstaff CVB, The Fairmont Scottsdale Princess, Red Rock Jeep Tours of Sedona, White Stallion Ranch in Tucson, Destination Grand Canyon West and the Grand Canyon Visitors Bureau. During the four day show, appointments were held with approximately 30 tour operators to review their current destinations and look at ways to expand their Arizona product and hopefully increase the number of visitors to the Grand Canyon State. For additional information or a copy of the World Travel Market Lead report contact Kristy Swanson at 602-364-3696 or via email at kswanson@azot.gov.

Media Mission in the Mile High City

On December 5, AOT held a media marketplace and reception for Denver-area travel media. Denver is not only a great market for Arizona, but is also home to several good publications and freelance travel writers. About 35 journalists attended the event and collected story ideas for the upcoming year. Partners who went with AOT were the Greater Phoenix CVB, Scottsdale CVB, Tempe CVB, Metropolitan Tucson CVB and Cochise County. For more information on this event, contact Heather Koncilja at hkoncilja@azot.gov.

Industry News

Save the Date: Arizona Tourism Unity Dinner

Wednesday, March 28, 2007, 5:30 p.m.- 9:00 p.m.

The Arizona Tourism Alliance will host the 3rd Annual Arizona Tourism Unity dinner in Phoenix on Wednesday, March 28, 2007 at the Arizona Biltmore Resort and Spa's Frank Lloyd Wright Ballroom from 5:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. This elegant evening will bring together both public and private sector organizations statewide to celebrate unity within the tourism industry and honor individuals for their extraordinary support and service to Arizona's travel and tourism industry. The night will start off with a reception and silent auction from 5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. The dinner and program will begin at 7:00 p.m. Mark your calendars and join in this valuable opportunity to celebrate our support for Arizona tourism and its leaders. For more information on sponsorship opportunities and guidelines for silent auction donations, visit the web site at http://aztourismalliance.org/uni_events.htm#Unity.

Feds Issue New Recreation Pass

The Department of Agriculture announced a new interagency recreation pass that officials say will benefit visitors to national public lands. The new pass, authorized by Congress in 2004, combines the benefits of existing recreation passes of five federal agencies into one comprehensive pass, "The American the Beautiful National Park and Federal Recreational Lands Pass." The new pass covers recreational opportunities on public lands managed by four Department of Interior agencies, including the National Park Service, Fish and Wild life Service, Bureau of Land management and the Agriculture Department's U.S. Forest Service. The program replaces the Golden Eagle, Golden Age and the Golden Access Passports as well as the National Parks Pass. Existing passes will remain valid until expired, lost or stolen. Sales of new pass will begin in January. (*Special to Travel Advance*, 12/8/06)

ATA Predicts High Volume of Holiday Air Travel

The Air Transport Association is forecasting that some 42 million passengers will travel globally on U.S. airlines during the 2006 winter holiday season, which includes the 21-day period from

Thursday, Dec. 14 through Wednesday, Jan. 3--an estimated increase of 2.4 percent compared to the same 21-day period a year earlier. The nation's airlines expect average load factors to exceed 80 percent and are projecting the busiest days to be Thursday, Dec. 21, with approximately 2.3 million passengers, Friday, Dec. 22 (2.2 million) and Tuesday, Dec. 26, (2.2 million). (*Special to Travel Advance; Page 1A, Miami Herald*)

U.S. Ranks Last Among 7 Nations on Entry Process

Foreign business and leisure travelers are making their feelings known about difficulties in entering the U.S. In a survey, foreign travelers rated the entry process the worst among the seven top regional destinations in the world, according to the Discover America Partnership, a tourism industry and business group that promotes foreign travel. Geoff Freeman, executive director of the group, said the study should be a "wake-up call" for the U.S. government to improve customer service and other procedures for visitors. While foreign visitors overwhelmingly reported positive experiences once they were in the U.S., "perceptions of rude and arrogant entry process are turning away travelers and harming America's image," he said, adding that business travel was down 10 percent in the period covered by the survey, while it was growing in other regions. The six destinations that scored higher than the U.S. were Europe, Asia, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and the Middle East. (*Page C9, New York Times*)

TIA Launches Passport Information Web Site

The Travel Industry Association and the Travel Business Roundtable have launched a Web site to aid new passport applications in advance of stricter U.S. government regulations on international travel. GetAPassportNow.com is aimed at educating travelers about the pending Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative requirements that all air travelers to the U.S. have a passport or other secure documents beginning Jan. 23, 2007. The new legislation, approved by Congress in 2004, closes a previous exception given to American returning from Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean. The changing rules have spurred a 60 percent increase in U.S. passport applications in 2006 over the previous year, said TIA President and CEO Roger Dow. "Our objective is to educate the traveling public--to have one-stop shopping for people who want information on getting a passport, whether they are from the United States, Canada or Mexico," Dow said. Visitors to the TIA Web site will be able to type in their Zip Code to access information on the closest location to apply for a passport. (*Special to Travel Advance: Business Travel News.com, 12/11; TravelAgent Central.com, 12/11; Travel Weekly.com, 12/11; Modern-Agent.com, 12/11; Orlando Sentinel.com; Page D6, Wall Street Journal*)

JetBlue Adding Legroom by Removing Seats

JetBlue Airways, trying to improve its appeal to travelers and cut costs in one move, said Wednesday that it planned to remove a row of seats from all 96 of its Airbus 320 planes, giving the front 11 rows 36 inches between seatbacks, instead of the current 32 inches. Many coach section seats on major airlines have 31 or 32 inches of pitch, making for cramped quarters, especially for taller travelers. Reducing the seating to 150 seats from 156 will allow JetBlue to fly the Airbus 320 with three flight attendants instead of the current four. (*Page C4, New York Times*)

Tourism Sales Dip For First Time in 4 Years

U.S. tourism sales declined in the third quarter, the first slowdown in four years, on the back of new security restrictions for air travel announced in August, the Commerce Department said on Thursday. Tourism sales dropped to \$583.98 billion in the third quarter, from a revised \$586.42 billion in the second quarter, for a decline of 1.7 percent on an annualized basis, the Commerce Department said in a quarterly report. Passenger air travel, after growing a revised 11.6 percent in the second quarter, plunged 11.6 percent in the third quarter, as the restrictions on carry-on items added to travel woes. Traveler accommodations fell for the second straight quarter, dropping 4.2

percent in the third quarter, after a 1.1 percent decline in the second quarter. (*Washington Post.com; ModernAgent.com*)

Tour Operators High on 2007

Tour operators are confident that 2007 will be a lucrative year, according to members of the U.S. Tour Operators Association at the annual conference in Scottsdale, Ariz. Tour operators are looking forward to an increase in international travelers, an expansion of airline routes and a financially stable business environment. Though they differed in their assessment of its ultimate effect on business, tour operators expressed optimism at the prospect of a record number of Americans holding passports. According to USTOA Chairman Nikos Tsakanikas, 70 million Americans now have passports. He said the number of American passport holders is expected to increase to 80 million in 2007. USTOA President Bob Whitley said the year 2007 is "shaping up to be the best since 2000." (*Travel Weekly.com, 12/11*)

Half of All Travelers Now Buy Travel Online

According to a recent survey, and even more than that go online solely to research their travel plans. The study also found that those who book from a third-party online travel agency such as Hotwire.com and Expedia.com have a satisfying experience. A J.D. Power and Associates report found that, on average, online travel agencies scored 810 out of 1,000 points on the satisfaction scale. Hotwire got top grades with 824 points, and Expedia came in second with 813 points. Hotels.com, rated 788, came in last of the eight sites ranked. Though consumers are generally happy with these sites, the study finds that they still prefer making trip arrangements from so-called supplier sites--directly from airlines and hotels. Twice as many people book reservations directly with the airline, hotel or car-rental agency Web site rather than the independent online agencies. (*Los Angeles Times.com/Travel*)

2007 Trend Says Spas Less About Relaxation, More About Rehabilitation

Fashionable travelers take note: the top spa trends in 2007, as predicted by the spa information and research company Spa Finder Inc., are less about relaxation than rehabilitation. Gone are the days of the simple decadent massage. Now, according to the spa-ficionados, intensive "de-tox spas," offering therapies to purge the body of "emotional baggage" and treatments like sweatings to rid it of toxins, are gaining in popularity. Spa Finder also says to look for resorts and hotels to offer themselves as "destination spas" that provide workshops, spiritual retreats and even "boot camps" and for many hotels to work harder at being green. Another trend: "social spa-ing," in which guests can "connect, converse and play in the spa environment." (*Sect. 5, Page 2, New York Times*)